TASKMASTER
MARVEL PG 4 of 4
MAD!
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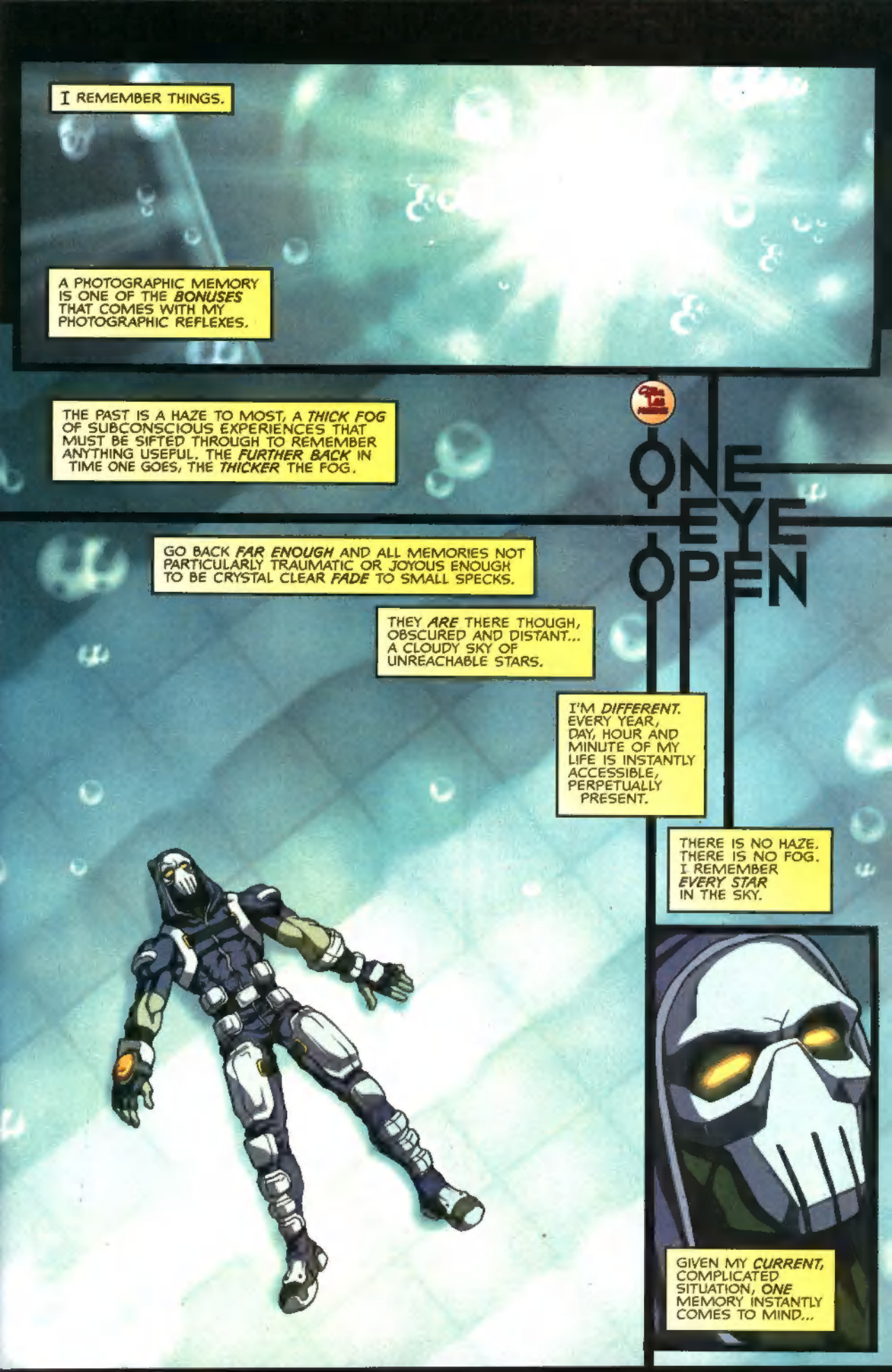
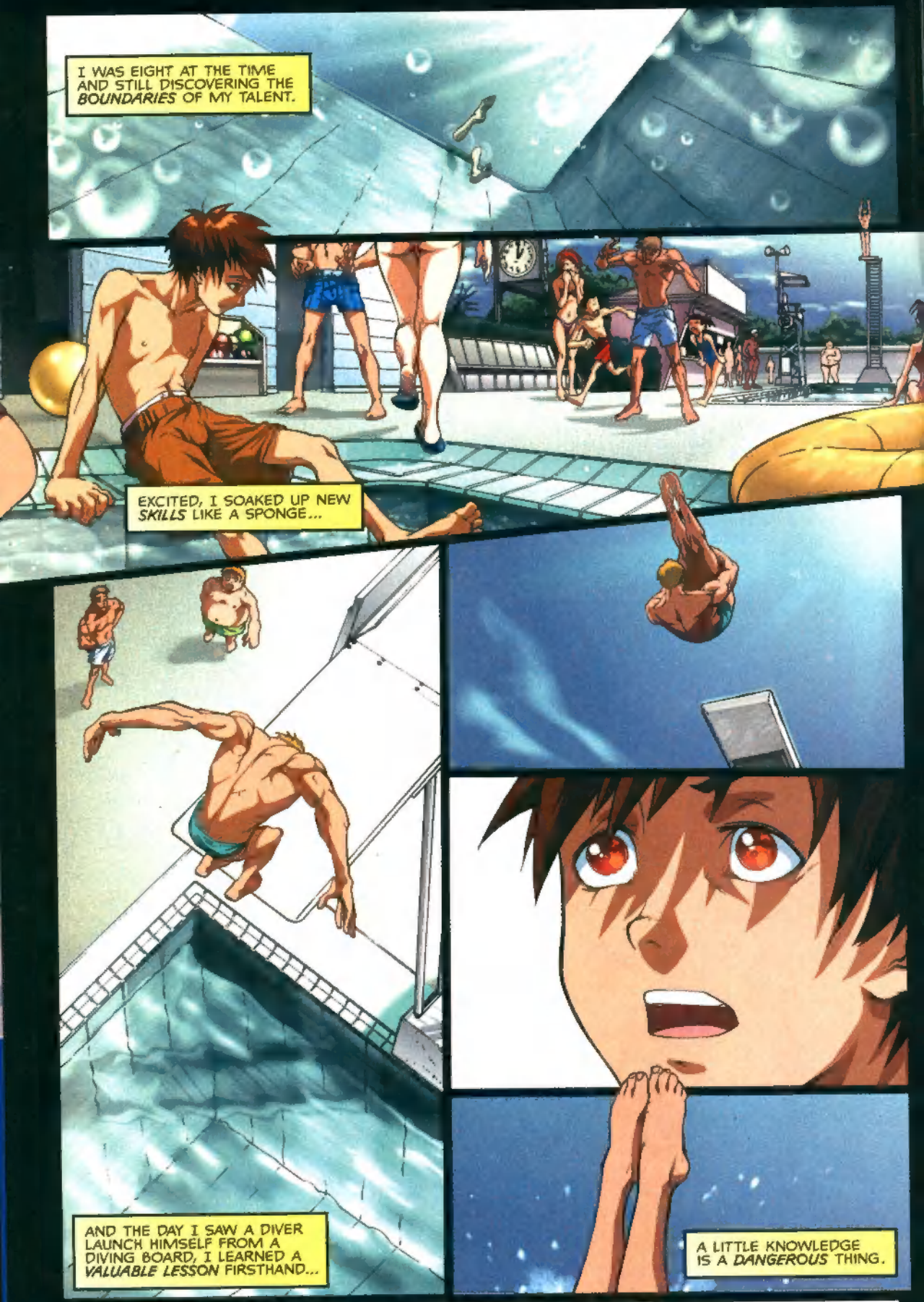

I REMEMBER THINGS.
A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY IS ONE OF THE *BONUSES* THAT COMES WITH MY PHOTOGRAPHIC REFLEXES.
THE PAST IS A HAZE TO MOST, A *THICK* FOG OF SUBCONSCIOUS EXPERIENCES THAT MUST BE SIFTED THROUGH TO REMEMBER ANYTHING USEFUL. THE *FURTHER BACK* IN TIME ONE GOES, THE *THICKER* THE FOG.
ONE EYE OPEN
GO BACK *FAR ENOUGH* AND ALL MEMORIES NOT PARTICULARLY TRAUMATIC OR JOYOUS ENOUGH TO BE CRYSTAL CLEAR *FADE* TO SMALL SPECKS.
THEY *ARE* THERE THOUGH, OBSCURED AND DISTANT... A CLOUDY SKY OF UNREACHABLE STARS.
I'M *DIFFERENT.* EVERY YEAR, DAY, HOUR AND MINUTE OF MY LIFE IS INSTANTLY ACCESSIBLE, PERPETUALLY PRESENT.
THERE IS NO HAZE. THERE IS NO FOG. I REMEMBER *EVERY STAR* IN THE SKY.
GIVEN MY *CURRENT,* COMPLICATED SITUATION, *ONE* MEMORY INSTANTLY COMES TO MIND...


I WAS EIGHT AT THE TIME AND STILL DISCOVERING THE *BOUNDARIES* OF MY TALENT.
EXCITED, I SOAKED UP NEW *SKILLS* LIKE A SPONGE...
AND THE DAY I SAW A DIVER LAUNCH HIMSELF FROM A DIVING BOARD, I LEARNED A *VALUABLE LESSON* FIRSTHAND...
A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE IS A *DANGEROUS* THING.

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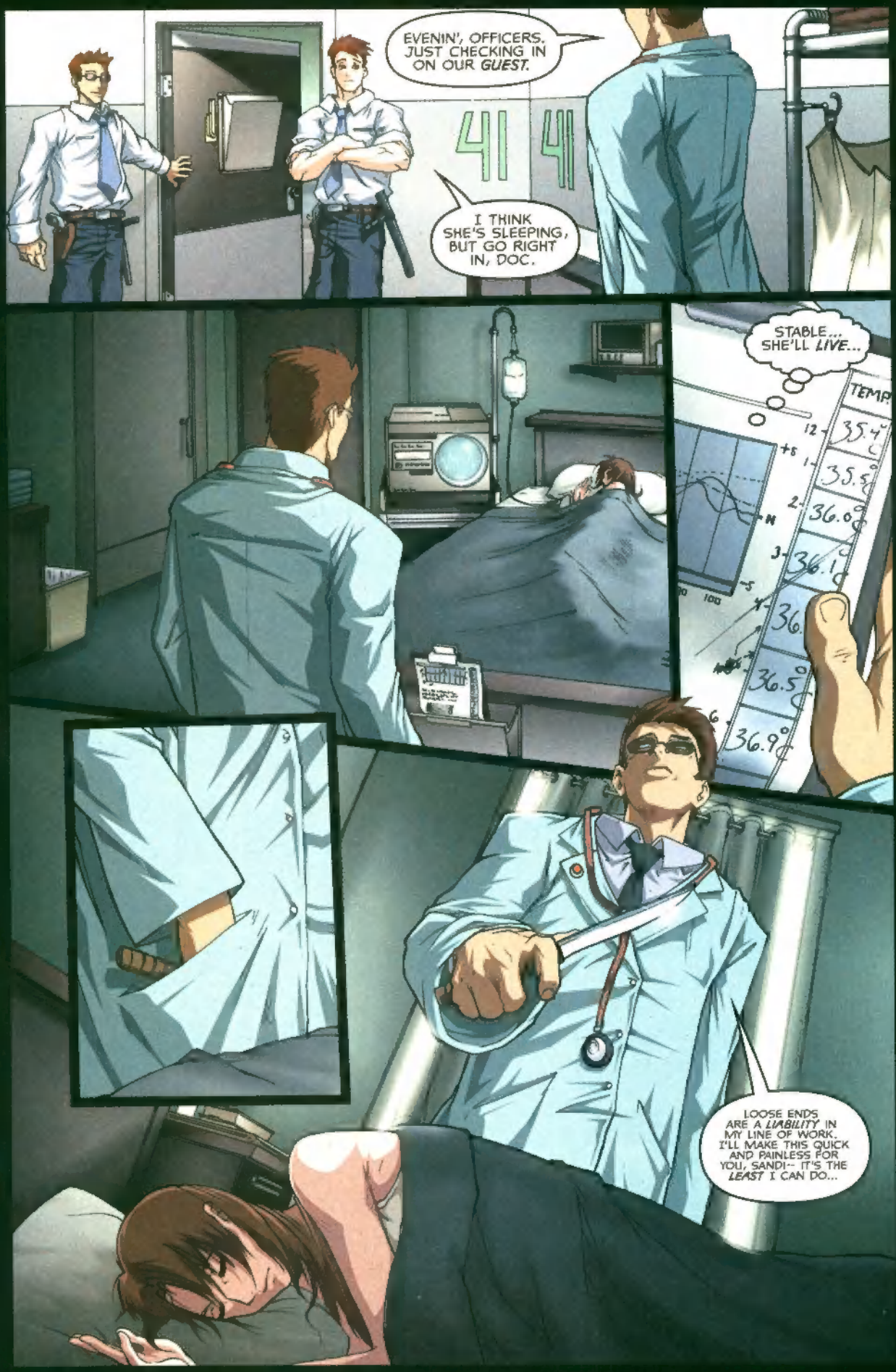
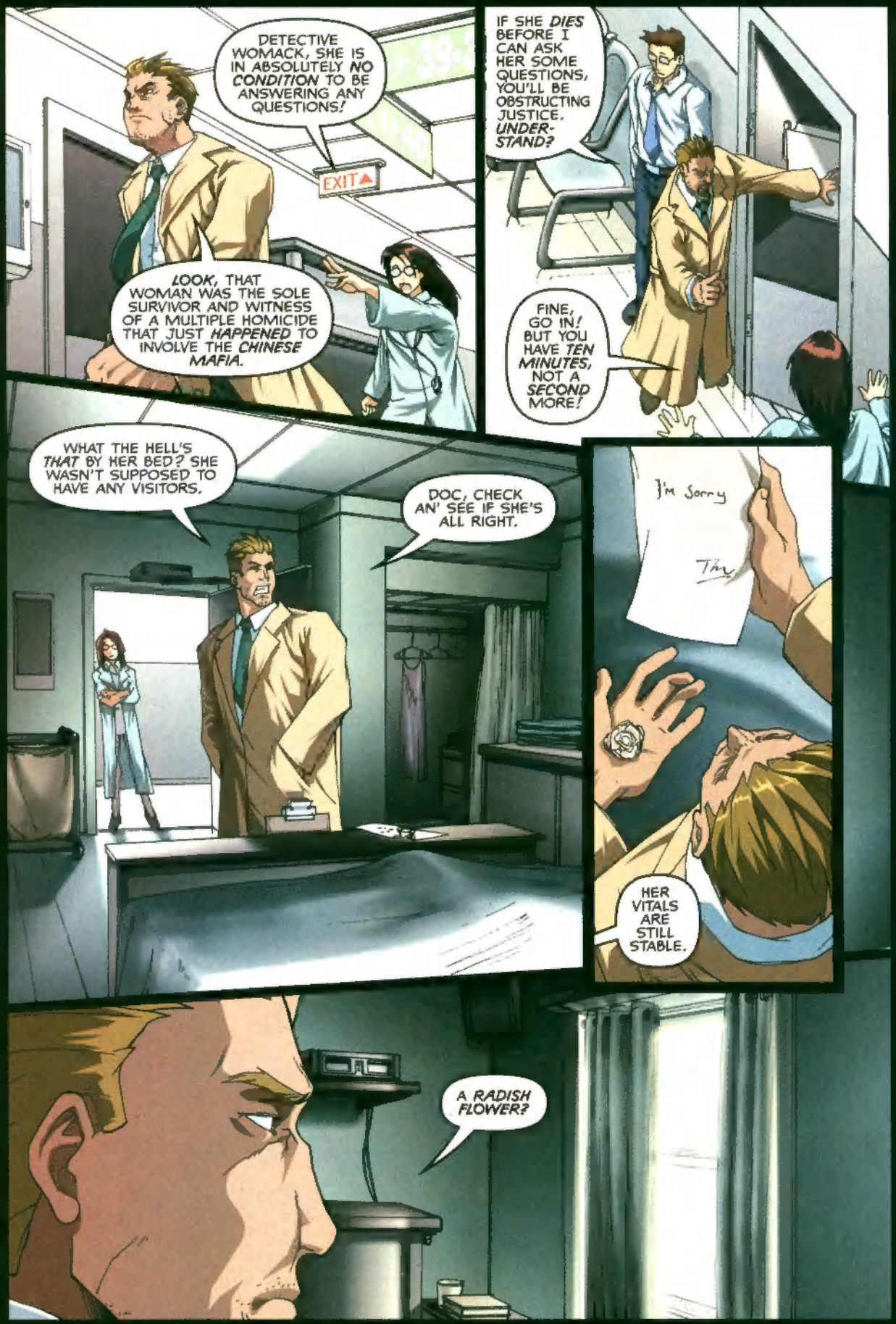
I COULD MIMIC A COWBOY'S TWIRL OF A LASSO...
...BUT THAT DID NOT MAKE ME A COWBOY.
I COULD MIMIC A SKY HOOK BY AN NBA CENTER...
...BUT THAT DID NOT MAKE ME A BASKETBALL PLAYER.
AND WHILE I MIMICKED THE DIVER, REPEATING HIS MOVEMENTS WITH SUBTLE AND EXPERT SKILL...
...THAT DID NOT CHANGE THE FACT THAT I'D LEARNED TO RUN BEFORE LEARNING TO WALK...
...I LEARNED TO DIVE BEFORE LEARNING TO SWIM.

I REMEMBER THINGS, AND I REMEMBER THAT MOMENT WITH UNWAVERING CLARITY.
EACH MILLISECOND THAT MY LUNGS CRIED FOR AIR BUT WERE INSTEAD FILLED WITH BURNING CHLORINE...
...AND EVERY SIGHT, SOUND, SMELL, TASTE AND TOUCH ARE AS VIBRANT AS IF THEY WERE FOREVER HAPPENING NOW.
I DEVELOPED AN ACUTE FEAR OF DROWNING, AND IN MY BUSINESS, THAT IS A LIABILITY.
I LEARNED TO SWIM, BUT THAT DID NOT ALLAY MY FEAR.
THAT CAME YEARS LATER WHEN I DISCOVERED AN ESOTERIC BUDDHIST SCHOOL IN TIBET THAT EDUCATED ME IN ARCANE MEDITATION TECHNIQUES.
I LEARNED TO SLOW MY BREATHING AND HEART RATE, ALLOWING ME TO SURVIVE FOR EXTENDED PERIODS WITHOUT OXYGEN.
AS A RESULT, I COULD ALSO REDUCE MY VITAL SIGNS TO THE POINT THAT AN UNTRAINED EYE COULD MISTAKE ME FOR DEAD...
FOR MY ENEMIES, A VERY FATAL MISTAKE.

SPIDER-MAN, AVENGERS, DAREDEVIL... THEY BETTER AAAALL WATCH OUT!
CUZ I'M... TASKMASTER! AND-CLASS-IS-IN-SESSION!!
BWAHA! GOMEZ, YOU'RE KILLIN' ME!
WHA?
Y-YOU'RE ALIVE!? B-BUT WE K-KILLED YOU!
GOMEZ?!
YOU DIDN'T DO A VERY GOOD JOB.
LET ME SHOW YOU HOW IT'S DONE!

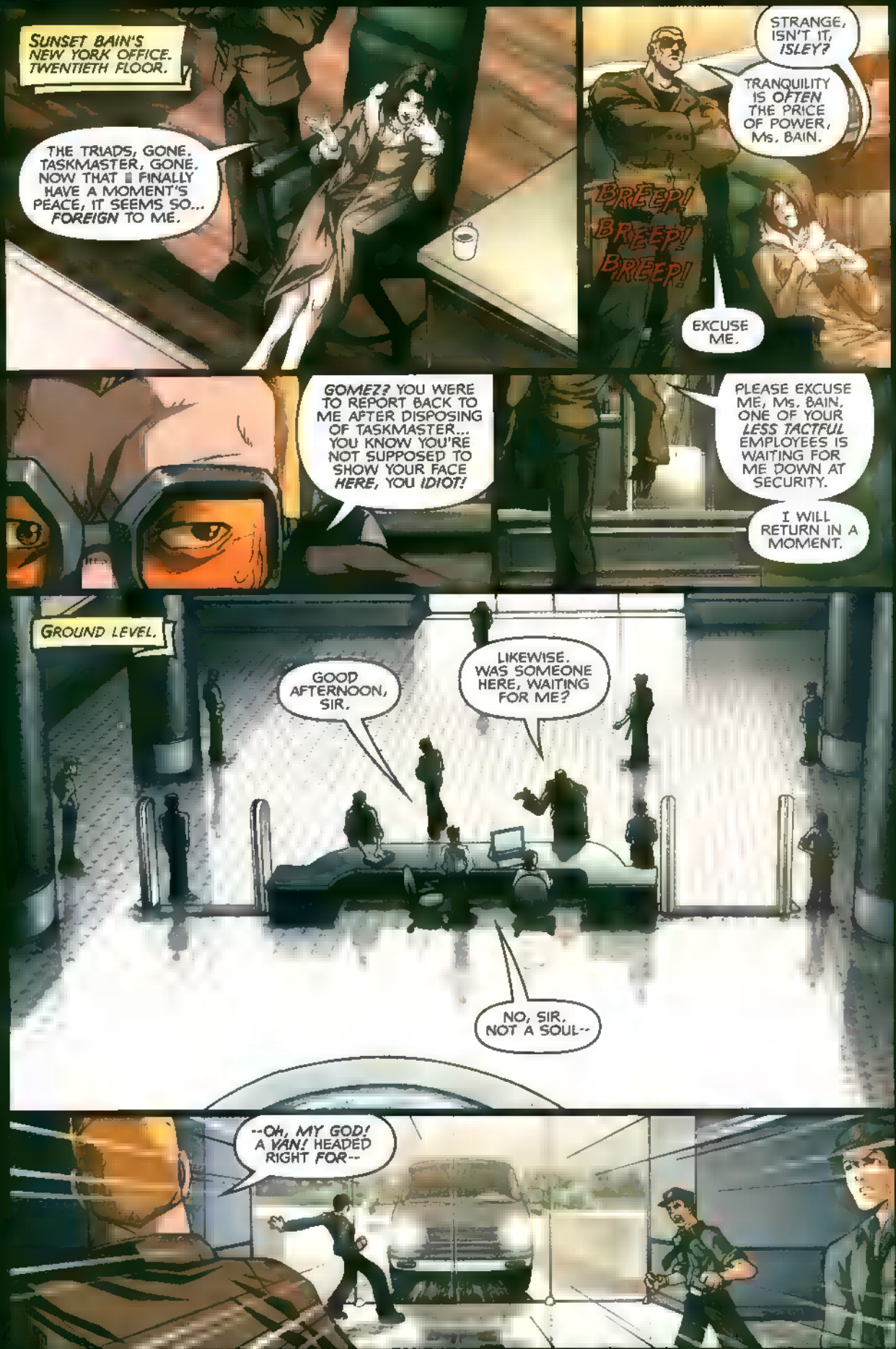
WACK!!
EXAMPLE: A PROPERLY PLACED PALM-STRIKE TO THE NOSE SENDS BONE FRAGMENTS AND CARTILAGE INTO THE BRAIN. INSTANT DEATH.
KRAKT!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
PAY ATTENTION...
...I WAS ABOUT TO SHOW YOU HOW TO CRUSH SOMEONE'S SKULL.
KRUNCH!
AND THE FINAL LESSON IS THE USE OF CAR DOORS.
UNNGHH...!
WUH-KRACK! WUH-KRACK! WUH-SPLAKT!
SANDI...
SCREEE


EVENIN', OFFICERS. JUST CHECKING IN ON OUR GUEST.
41
41
I THINK SHE'S SLEEPING, BUT GO RIGHT IN, DOC.
STABLE... SHE'LL LIVE...
TEMP
35.4°
35.5°
36.0°
36.1°
36.5°
36.9°
LOOSE ENDS ARE A LIABILITY IN MY LINE OF WORK. I'LL MAKE THIS QUICK AND PAINLESS FOR YOU, SANDI-- IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO...


DETECTIVE WOMACK, SHE IS IN ABSOLUTELY NO CONDITION TO BE ANSWERING ANY QUESTIONS!
EXIT
LOOK, THAT WOMAN WAS THE SOLE SURVIVOR AND WITNESS OF A MULTIPLE HOMICIDE THAT JUST HAPPENED TO INVOLVE THE CHINESE MAFIA.
IF SHE DIES BEFORE I CAN ASK HER SOME QUESTIONS, YOU'LL BE OBSTRUCTING JUSTICE. UNDER-STAND?
FINE, GO IN! BUT YOU HAVE TEN MINUTES, NOT A SECOND MORE!
WHAT THE HELL'S THAT BY HER BED? SHE WASN'T SUPPOSED TO HAVE ANY VISITORS.
DOC, CHECK AN' SEE IF SHE'S ALL RIGHT.
I'm Sorry
Thy
HER VITALS ARE STILL STABLE.
A RADISH FLOWER?

EARLY NEXT MORNING, TASKMASTER'S NEW YORK PENTHOUSE.
LOOK AT THIS MESS...
HEY, HOPKINS! WHERE YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING WITH ALL THAT?
TAKING THIS EVIDENCE DOWN TO THE STATION.
THE BOYS AT THE LAB SHOULD HAVE FUN SORTING THROUGH IT.
OKAY, TELL 'EM TO GET A REPORT ON MY DESK ASAP.
MORNIN', WOMACK. DID I MISS ANY-THING?
Eh? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOIN' BACK SO SOON? WHERE'RE THOSE BOXES?
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I JUST GOT HERE.
???
PARK

C+B Motel
Pawn Shop
THIS ISN'T GOING TO BE EASY, BUT LATELY I'VE BEEN GETTING USED TO DOING THINGS THE HARD WAY--THAT'S THE WAY IT IS WHEN IT COMES TO REVENGE.
DEATH BY LONG DISTANCE WON'T BE GOOD ENOUGH. I HAVE TO SEE SUNSET'S EYES SCREAM HER FINAL THOUGHT: I SCREWED WITH THE WRONG GUY.
STIFFING ME ON THAT MILLION DOLLAR TAB WAS A BIG MISTAKE, BUT ATTEMPTING TO HAVE ME KILLED MEANS A SERIOUS ADJUSTMENT TO OUR CONTRACT.
THE MAIN FLOOR OF BAIN'S COMPLEX HAS AT LEAST TWO DOZEN ARMED GUARDS, AND THERE ARE A HALF DOZEN MORE ON EVERY OTHER FLOOR.
I'LL NEED A DISTRACTION TO HAVE THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE AT GETTING TO HER.
BUT EVEN WITH A DIVERSION I'LL BE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED.
IMPOSSIBLE IS WHAT THIS IS, EVEN FOR ME.
I CAN'T SIMPLY MIMIC SOMEONE'S SKILLS BECAUSE THERE'S NO ONE ALIVE WHO'D [redacted] ABLE TO PULL THIS OFF.
I'LL HAVE TO TRY SOME-THING...
...DIFFERENT.


SUNSET BAIN'S NEW YORK OFFICE. TWENTIETH FLOOR.
THE TRIADS, GONE. TASKMASTER, GONE. NOW THAT I FINALLY HAVE A MOMENT'S PEACE, IT SEEMS SO... FOREIGN TO ME.
STRANGE, ISN'T IT, ISLEY?
TRANQUILITY IS OFTEN THE PRICE OF POWER, Ms. BAIN.
BREEP! BREEP! BREEP!
EXCUSE ME.
GOMEZ? YOU WERE TO REPORT BACK TO ME AFTER DISPOSING OF TASKMASTER... YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO SHOW YOUR FACE HERE, YOU IDIOT!
PLEASE EXCUSE ME, Ms. BAIN. ONE OF YOUR LESS TACTFUL EMPLOYEES IS WAITING FOR ME DOWN AT SECURITY.
I WILL RETURN IN A MOMENT.
GROUND LEVEL.
GOOD AFTERNOON, SIR.
LIKEWISE. WAS SOMEONE HERE, WAITING FOR ME?
NO, SIR. NOT A SOUL--
--OH, MY GOD! A VAN! HEADED RIGHT FOR--

SKRASH!
!
CRASH!
SPLOOSH!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
TASKMASTER?
?!
BRA-KOOM!
RUN!

IF YOU WERE LOOKING FOR *ME*, MY BULLETS AND I ASSURE YOU THAT I'M *NO* HOLOGRAM.
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
YEAARGH! MY *EYES!*
KRAKOW!!
OVER *THERE!*
BLAM!
I OWE MANY OF MY SKILLS TO MY NUMEROUS TRIPS THROUGH *ASIA*.
NOW I PREFER CARRYING A *KATANA* TO A FENCING SWORD, THANKS TO MY RECORDING THE TECHNIQUES OF A CERTAIN *SAMURAI*...

A SILVER SAMURAI.
GASH!
SKASH!
GISH!
I-- I CAN'T GET A BEAD ON HIM! HOW CAN HE MOVE THAT FAS--
SLASH!
--*
SLA-CHAK!

BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
BA-DAM!
I ONCE HEARD OF *HINDU ASCETICS* WHO COULD BE PUNCTURED BY NAILS, BLADES AND BULLETS WITHOUT BLEEDING OR FEELING *PAIN*.
CHING!
DAMMIT...
PAK!
UNFORTUNATELY, I NEVER GOT AROUND TO *RESEARCHING* IT MYSELF, MEANING THIS STILL *HURTS LIKE HELL!*
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
VZMMMM
TANG!
TANG!
KA-TANG!

TWENTIETH FLOOR.
HE'S ON HIS WAY UP! GET READY!
DON'T SHOOT! DON'T SHOOT! HE'S COMIN' UP THE STAIRWELL! HURRY!
YOU'RE HURT. YOU A'RIGHT?
BLAM!
=URK!=
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!

THAT WAS RATHER SWIFT. WHAT DID GOMEZ HAVE TO SAY FOR HIMSELF?
NOT MUCH. BUT HE DID SHARE THIS WITH ME...
"YET IT BE LESS OR MORE, OR SOON OR SLOW
"IT SHALL ■ STILL ■ STRICTEST MEASURE EV'N
"TO THAT SAME LOT, HOWEVER MEAN OR HIGH
"TOWARD WHICH TIME LEADS ME, AND THE WILL OF HEAV'N:
"ALL IS, IF I HAVE GRACE TO USE IT SO..."
"...AS EVER IN MY GREAT TASKMASTER'S EYE."
YOU ARROGANT--
I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU REMEMBERED YOUR MILTON, SUNSET.
SOME-HOW THIS WOULDN'T HAVE ■■■ AS APPROPRIATE IF YOU'D FORGOTTEN IT.

SLAM!
YOU TOOK YOUR *TIME* COMING UP, TASKMASTER. WITH MY PRIVATE EXPRESS ELEVATOR I WAS HERE *AGES* AGO.
÷SIGH÷ NOT YOU AGAIN.
BLAMM!
THERE IS A *REASON* I MADE Mr. ISLEY MY ASSISTANT AND BODYGUARD.
HEH.
HE HAS CERTAIN... *UNIQUE SKILLS* THAT MADE HIM EXCEPTIONALLY WELL-SUITED FOR THE JOB.
NICE *CIRCUS TRICK* YOU HAVE THERE, ISLEY, BUT I WON'T NEED GUNS TO HANDLE BAIN'S YES-MAN.

YOU WOULD NOT BE QUITE SO BOLD IF YOU KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT ME.
Ms. BAIN HIRED ME FOR MY UNEQUALED HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING SKILL AND SPEED.
HE IS GOOD. IF IT WEREN'T FOR MY EARLIER EXPERIMENT, I'D BE EATING MY OWN TEETH.
WHUD!
BUT AFTER REVIEWING MY REFERENCE MATERIAL IN DOUBLE-SPEED, I REALIZED I COULD PERFORM MY ACTIONS IN DOUBLE-SPEED AS WELL.
IM-IMPOSSIBLE, NO MAN CAN MOVE THAT FAST!
HE'S RIGHT. NO NORMAL PERSON ON EARTH IS THIS FAST...

THE ONLY PROBLEM IS THAT I'M MOVING *TWICE* AS FAST AS THE HUMAN BODY WAS *DESIGNED* TO.
A SECOND MORE OF THIS AND I'LL EITHER *SHATTER* EVERY BONE IN MY BODY OR *PASS OUT* FROM EXHAUSTION.
I'VE ALREADY LOST TOO MUCH BLOOD...
...I HAVE TO FINISH THIS RIGHT...
...NOW!
WHOOMP!

BLAM!
NOW WHY DID YOU HAVE TO DO *THAT?*
DO YOU REALIZE HOW *DIFFICULT* IT WILL BE TO REPLACE *Mr. ISLEY?*
BLAM!
AHHH!
LOOKING FOR *THIS?*

GOODBYE, SUNSET--
?!
HE'S GOT A GUN POINTED AT Ms. BAIN! FIRE!!
SKRASSH!
BRATTA! BRATTA! BRATTA!
YOU GOT LUCKY TODAY, BAIN. BUT REMEMBER...
...SLEEP WITH ONE EYE OPEN.

EPILOGUE.
ONE WEEK LATER.
FINALLY SOME REAL *AIR*... ANOTHER *SECOND* IN THAT CRAMPED HOSPITAL ROOM AND I WOULD HAVE *SUFFOCATED!*
PLEASE STEP *THIS* WAY, Ms. BAIN. I'LL RIDE WITH YOU AND *GUARDS* WILL BE IN FRONT AND BEHIND.
DON'T WORRY, Ms. BAIN, YOU'LL BE *SAFE* WITH US.
HOSPITAL

Fin.
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